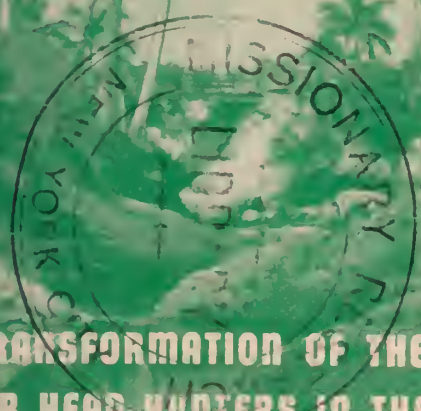


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A Chaplain in Melanesia



THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE
FORMER HEAD HUNTERS IN THE
SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS.

BY CHAPLAIN ERLING R. JACOBSON, U. S. NAVY

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A Chaplain In Melanesia

The transformation of the former head-
hunters in the South Pacific Islands



By

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EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

Joint Division of Education and
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THE METHODIST CHURCH

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The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels

*Sergeant Herbert Beros
Australian Army, New South Wales*

Many a mother in Australia,
When the busy day is done,
Sends a prayer to the Almighty
For the keeping of her son,
Asking that an angel guide him,
And bring him safely back—
Now we see those prayers are answered
On the Owen Stanley track.

Though they haven't any halos—
Only holes slashed through their ears,
And their faces marked with tattoos
And with scratch pins in their hair;
Bringing back the badly wounded,
Just as steady as a hearse,
Using leaves to keep the rain off,
And as gentle as a nurse.

Slow and careful in bad places,
On the awful mountain track,
And the look upon their faces
Makes you think that Christ was black.
Not a move to hurt the wounded,
As they treat him like a saint,
It's a picture worth recording,
That an artist's yet to paint.

Many a lad will see his mother,
And husbands see their wives,
Just because the Fuzzy Wuzzies
Carried them to save their lives
From mortar or machine-gun fire,
Or a chance surprise attack,
To safety and the care of doctors
At the bottom of the track.

May the mothers of Australia,
When offering a prayer,
Mention those impromptu angels
With the fuzzy-wuzzy hair.

Permission of New York Herald Tribune.

A Chaplain in Melanesia

When I was appointed a Chaplain in the United States Navy I did not realize what it was going to do to my interest in foreign missions. Neither did many other men of our armed forces, I suspect. It was not until we were within a few days' journey of the island where we were to be based that I began to sense the foreign missions implications of my duty.

In a conversation with my executive officer that day concerning the attitude and the characteristics of the native inhabitants of the island, he made the statement that most of the natives were Christians. The native stock, I was told, was mainly Melanesian (Black Islanders), and as such sharply differentiated from the brown-skinned Polynesians.

The Church of England, the South Sea Evangelical Mission, the Roman Catholics, The Methodist Church (British), and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church had well-established mission programs on these islands. It is estimated that more than one-half of the native population is Christian.

A New Interest in Missions

That was the beginning of what has not only broadened my interest in foreign missions, but has also intensified my devotion to its program. I might never have had this experience if it were not the policy of the Chaplains'

Corps of the Navy to render such assistance to native missions as may be needed and as is compatible with its schedule of regular duties.

I do not want to be misunderstood. There never has been any doubt in my mind as to the justification of the foreign mission effort. But there is doubt in the minds of some of our church members back home. I encountered it among my parishioners. "Why expend all of that money in evangelizing remote areas in foreign lands when we have not yet consolidated our positions at home?" "Why disturb the age-old loyalties and beliefs of a people who seem to be managing quite well with their own deities?" To be sure, I had an answer, but not as convincing a one as I now have.

A Strange Collection

Others, too, have been similarly influenced and have become genuinely mission-minded, men who had previously been lukewarm on the subject of missions. There was the naval officer, for instance, who said to me, "I am going to start using the other half of my weekly church envelope now."

There was the Chaplain who invited the resident missionary, a bishop of the Church of England, to preach one Sunday morning. He told his story and made no appeal for funds; he merely asked for the prayers of the men. The Chaplain, however, announced that on the following Sunday he would place a box at

the door to receive an offering for missions. This congregation, not a large one—perhaps a hundred or more service men—offered \$187 that day. There were twenty-dollar bills in that box.

These men, you see, had observed the results of missionary work. In our mid-week prayer and discussion group I asked whether this duty overseas had awakened foreign mission interest in the men. Everyone present agreed that it had. Two of the men went even further; they had begun seriously to consider offering themselves as missionaries when the war is over.

Invaluable Allies

The “reservoir of friendliness,” to borrow a Willkie phrase, created by the missionary has been an important factor in the success of the military operations in the South Pacific. The natives are invaluable allies. They have rescued countless fliers forced down at sea. They have fed, sheltered, and befriended scores of survivors off sunken ships. Their knowledge of the jungle trails and their uncanny ability to traverse those trails silently and with unbelievable speed make them excellent guides and deadly effective in accounting for stray patrols or snipers.

Yes, they are on our side, unqualifiedly so, and they are especially fond of Americans. This amazing and heart-warming friendliness of the natives will receive its due recognition in the account of the ultimate victory.

More Than Allies

So foreign missionary activity got the United Nations some effective allies; therefore, it has been a good thing—is that what I am saying?

No, of course not. It is what the Gospel of Jesus has done for these Melanesian natives who up until a comparatively recent date were a warlike, savage, and primitive people. Cannibalism and head hunting were common practices among them. Their tattooed and disfigured faces and bodies, and the spears and war clubs that many of them still carry, are vestiges of the savagery and darkness from which they have been so recently delivered. I have had occasion to conduct a number of services for them, and I have talked with many of them.

What Christ Brought

“What has Christ brought to you?” I have asked them. I have received several answers to that question. None was quite as eloquent as that single word which came from the lips of a grizzled, somewhat fierce-visaged, old jungle veteran seated on the ground in the rear of the native building in which we were holding our meeting. “Light” was his answer.

Yes, light is a precious gift for a man who has lived in a world of darkness and fears, whose rivers are crocodile-infested, sharks in his sea, hostile man-eating tribes and evil spirits in his jungles, and an eternity of hopelessness before him.

Timon put his hand on the shoulder of the boy standing next to him and answered, "If it hadn't been for Christ, I would be fighting him instead of loving him." Jason had a good answer too, "Before, we said bad words, we fell to women, we stole; but now we know our mouth belong em God, and our bodies they temples of the living God."

Sixteen-year-old Raymond who was thinking of marriage put it this way: "Those who love Jesus don't pick their wives the way others do. They ask God to help pick right Mary." (All women are Mary to them.)

It is difficult to single out any one experience in my contacts with native Christians that has impressed me most. Timon's prayer was unforgettable. Two Christian men from the base went with me that night. I asked Timon, the native evangelist, to open the meeting with prayer. "Lord, heavenly Father," he prayed in his broken Pidgin-English, "bless the three brethren who are with us this evening. Though they have different bodies, yet they are our brothers, for we all have one blood in Christ."

Yes, you were right; the bushy hair, the black skin, and the thick lips are accidents of life. It is the blood that counts, the blood of Christ that makes us all one in Him.

They Love the Bible

Significant, too, is their love for the Word of God. It has happened again and again that natives have come to my tent, saluted smartly, and asked, "Me want em New Testament."

Fortunately, I had a large supply with me and I have been able to meet their needs. They gather every evening or morning to read and study that Word together. When they come to the meeting they bring with them their Bibles, note books and pencils—and a thirst for the Word.

One of the English officers stationed at this native labor camp told me that he had often found them sitting with the open Bible before them, lost in contemplation of the passage they were reading. They would read and reread the passage aloud, laboring over the pronunciation of the words, desperately striving to fathom its meaning. Then they would rise and stand looking off into space, immobile and transfixed, lost in meditation on what they had read, utterly oblivious of everything save the burning desire to comprehend the glorious Truth that was beginning to dawn in their minds.

The First Service

My first service for the natives was one of the memorable experiences of my life. Silas, a teacher and evangelist, an intelligent, benign, and soft-spoken man of about thirty-five years, came to my tent and asked me to conduct a service for his boys that evening. We decided to hold the meeting in a native building which had neither furniture nor floor.

It had been raining all week, and the area surrounding the native hut was a veritable sea of mud, ankle deep, and the floor of the hut only a little less so. It is difficult to de-

scribe what I thought and felt when I looked out across that muddy morass and saw the natives coming. They walked in single file, Silas in the lead with his Bible, song book, and note book under his arm, his face wreathed in smiles. Scantily clad, bare-headed and barefooted, they sloshed along, indifferent to the mud and the rain.

Here was a whole congregation of natives, only one or two generations removed from cannibalism, coming to hear the Gospel of which I was privileged to be the herald that evening. It is hard to say whether the responsibility or the privilege gripped me most. It was a glorious privilege and a rare experience to hear them sing their hymns, beautifully and in harmony; to bring a message—and they were such eager listeners—and then to have the meeting close with a prayer by one of the natives, a moving prayer for the Chaplains, for the success of our arms, and chiefly for the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

There are episodes of my experiences as a Chaplain in the war zone which I want to forget. But I shall always be grateful for the opportunity I have had—and many other Americans with me—to obtain first-hand information on the results of foreign mission work. It is my belief that there will be many returning American servicemen who, because of their contact with native Christians, will be much more zealous in their interest in foreign missions, and who will influence others to rediscover "the other half of the church offering envelope."

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